Pastor Comes Out as Trans During Sunday Church Service

By Madison Clark, 1 days ago

The sanctuary was quiet when a longtime pastor told her congregation she was done pretending to be someone she was not. In a few carefully chosen sentences, the minister shared that she is a transgender woman, turning an ordinary Sunday into a turning point for her church and for herself. What followed was a mix of tears, applause, and a very public lesson in what it looks like when faith and authenticity collide in real time.

Her story is part deeply personal confession, part case study in how modern churches handle gender identity in the pulpit. It is also a reminder that for many clergy, coming out is not just about private identity, it is about risking a calling, a paycheck, and a spiritual home in front of the people they serve every week.

Photo by Centre for Ageing Better

The Sunday morning that changed everything

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

On a recent Sunday in western New York, the Reverend who had long been known as Phil stepped up to the pulpit in a blonde wig, makeup, and a rainbow stole, and told the congregation that the person they thought they knew was only part of the story. In that moment, the pastor explained that she is a trans woman and that the change unfolding was not about becoming someone new, but about finally letting her real self be seen. The service at North Chili United Methodist Church had all the usual markers of worship, but the sermon turned into a life announcement that would be remembered for years.

Video and photos from the service show Reverend Phil Phaneuf, identified as Reverend Phil Phaneuf, standing before the congregation at North Chili United and describing the moment as one that would surely be remembered. In another account of the same service, the pastor is described as a NY pastor who told worshippers she was “giving up pretending to be a man,” a phrase that captured both the relief and the risk of the moment. Social media clips shared later framed it simply: pastor came out during a recent church service, and the sanctuary became the stage for a very public transition.

“I’m not becoming a woman, I’m giving up pretending to be a man”

From the pulpit, the pastor did not lean on abstract theology or distant hypotheticals. Instead, she used blunt, personal language to explain what was happening. “I’m not becoming a woman, I’m giving up pretending to be a man,” she told the congregation, drawing a clear line between transition and authenticity. That framing pushed back on the idea that gender transition is about inventing a new self, and instead cast it as dropping a disguise that had been in place for decades.

Accounts of the sermon describe how the Pastor Comes Out at the Pulpit and uses the exact phrasing “Not Becoming” a “Woman” but “Giving Up Pretending” to describe her transition, language that has since been repeated widely. In another report, she is identified as Phil Phaneuf, a New York pastor who announced a plan to transition into a woman during a church address while wearing a blonde wig and makeup. The consistency of that core line across coverage shows how central it was to the way she wanted her congregation, and the wider public, to understand what was happening.

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

From Phil to Phillippa: a new name in a familiar pulpit

Names carry weight in church life, and for a pastor, a name is tied to baptisms, funerals, weddings, and countless hospital visits. When the Reverend shared that she would now be known as Phillippa, it signaled that this was not a temporary experiment but a settled identity. The congregation was being asked to shift from “Pastor Phil” to “Pastor Phillippa,” a small change in syllables that represented a huge shift in how she moved through the world.

Social media posts now refer to her as Pastor Phillippa Phaneuf, described as a Methodist pastor in Rochester, New York who came out as a trans woman in front of her congregation. Another report describes a New York Pastor to her Congregation as Transgender and quotes her describing herself as “Happy For the First Time In” a “Very Long Time,” language that mirrors how she has spoken about finally living under her chosen name. The shift from Phil to Phillippa is not just cosmetic, it is a public declaration that the person in the pulpit is now aligned, in name and presentation, with the woman she says she has always been.

“Truly happy for the first time in a very long time”

For all the attention on wigs, stoles, and church politics, the heart of the story is emotional. Phillippa has described the period after coming out as one of unexpected joy, even as she navigates scrutiny and debate. She has said she is “truly happy for the first time in a very long time,” a line that cuts through the noise and lands as a simple statement of relief. After years of compartmentalizing, she is telling people that the cost of hiding had become too high.

Coverage of her story notes that the Pastor, 51, came out as Transgender During Emotional and described herself as “Truly Happy for the First Time in a Very Long Time.” Another report on the New York Pastor story repeats that she felt “Happy For the First Time In” a “Very Long Time,” underscoring how central that emotional shift is to her narrative. She has also spoken about feeling 100% herself for the first time, a metric of wholeness that is less about numbers and more about finally being able to breathe.

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

How the congregation and bishop responded

Coming out from the pulpit is not a solo act, it instantly pulls in everyone sitting in the pews and everyone in the denominational hierarchy above the pastor. In North Chili, the immediate reaction in the room included applause, hugs, and visible emotion, but the longer term response would depend on church leadership. For a pastor whose livelihood is tied to a denomination, the question is not just “Will they still love me?” but also “Will I still have a job?”

In this case, the regional bishop issued a formal statement titled For Immediate Release, listing Contact information for Shelby Winchell, the Director of Communications, and noting that On November 23, Rev. Dr. Phil Phaneuf came out as transgender. The statement emphasized that the conference does not discriminate based on gender identity or gender expression, signaling institutional backing at a moment when some congregants were still processing what they had heard. That kind of official support does not erase every tension, but it sets a tone that this pastor is not being quietly pushed out the side door.

What it means to be a trans pastor in mainline churches

Phillippa’s story is unfolding inside a broader shift in mainline Protestant denominations, where policies and culture around LGBTQ clergy have been slowly changing. Some churches now openly ordain queer and trans pastors, while others remain deeply divided. For clergy who come out mid-career, the question is whether the institution that trained and appointed them will make room for their whole selves or treat their transition as a problem to be managed.

One example of a denomination wrestling with this is the ELCA, where trans pastors like a Colorado minister have spoken about once being banned from the pulpits they now serve. In that Colorado story, a transgender Latina pastor named Garcia recalls asking, “Why would they want a transgender Latina in the ELCA?” as she stepped into a role that had previously been closed to people like her. Another trans pastor, Peter Beeson, was welcomed into Matthew Trinity Lutheran, which is part of the Evangelical Lutheran

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Church in America, a Protestant body that has made space for transgender clergy. Phillippa's experience sits in that same stream of cautious but real institutional change.

Media spotlight and national conversation

Once the video of Phillippa's announcement started circulating, her story quickly jumped from a local church moment to a national talking point. Clips of her sermon were shared widely, and interviews followed, turning a deeply personal Sunday into a public debate about gender, faith, and leadership. For a pastor used to preaching to a few hundred people, suddenly having millions weigh in can be disorienting, but it also gives her a platform to talk about trans lives in a context that is often missing from cable news panels.

One in-depth interview with the transgender reverend notes that the reporter covering her story usually reports from the White House, Congress, and the Supreme Court, and that writer Wiggins has written multiple cover stories, a sign of how her story has reached the national spotlight. Other outlets framed her as a pastor whose announcement sparked debate among viewers, while social media posts highlighted the raw emotion of a recent church service where a minister came out as transgender. The mix of sympathetic profiles and critical commentary reflects the broader cultural divide around trans visibility, especially in religious spaces.

Other pastors who have taken the same risk

Phillippa is not the first pastor to come out as trans from the pulpit, and she will not be the last. Around North America, a small but growing number of clergy have told their congregations that the person they thought they knew is actually a woman or man who has been hiding in plain sight. Each story is different, but the pattern is familiar: years of internal struggle, a breaking point, and then a Sunday when the truth finally gets spoken into a microphone.

In Canada, Pastor Junia Jofflin has shared how, when she was younger, she was told to always tell her truth, and that she finally did so by coming out to her congregation. In the United States, trans pastors like Garcia in Colorado and Peter Beeson at Matthew Trinity have also stepped into pulpits they once would have been barred from. Together with Pastor Phillippa, they form a small but visible cohort of clergy whose lives are forcing

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

denominations to decide whether their theology of grace and inclusion really applies to everyone.

Why this Sunday matters beyond one church

For people sitting in the pews that morning, the announcement was about their pastor, their church, and their own comfort level with change. But zoomed out, the moment lands in the middle of a national fight over trans rights, religious freedom, and who gets to speak for Christianity in public life. When a pastor like Phillippa comes out and keeps preaching, it quietly challenges the narrative that all churches are hostile to trans people, and it gives trans Christians a rare image of someone like them at the center of the sanctuary instead of at the margins.

Her story has been told as that of a Pastor who says that serving openly as a trans woman has so far been a rewarding experience, and as a New York Pastor who feels happy for the first time in a very long time. It has also been framed by critics who focus on the phrase “giving up pretending to be a man” and question what that means for traditional teachings. Yet whether people see her as a hero, a controversy, or simply a neighbor trying to live honestly, the fact remains that a Sunday service in a modest church has become part of a much larger conversation about who gets to stand at the pulpit and tell the truth about who they are.

More from Vinyl and Velvet:

- 7 Hidden Treasures You Can Still Find at Estate Sales
- 6 Ways To Mix Modern Style With Vintage Pieces Beautifully
- 5 Vintage Toys From the ’70s Now Worth Thousands
- 7 Vintage Finds Designers Say Are Worth Collecting

COMMENTS / 3K

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Login to write comments

Response

Community Policy

Hottest | Most recent

nobody 1d ago

Rom 1:26 KJV For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:😎👍

Reply(92) 657

K **Kathleen Woytasczyk** 1d ago

Have you read it? I have but I doubt that pastor has

Reply 173

More replies

Chobe 1d ago

How can you be a Pastor and then come out against God in this matter. If my Pastor came out as a Trans, i would be out of my church so fast. I would be praying for him.

Reply(227) 1848

J **James Ross** 1d ago

Hell Bound

Reply 495

More replies

eye roll 1d ago

Church is supposed to be about Christ not the preacher

Reply(62) 124

E **Ella C.** 1d ago

That's interesting🤔 but sinful people are not supposed to be teaching the Lord's people.

Reply 94

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

More replies

Megan Finley now

the devil is everywhere even in God's house.. but a true christian wouldn't do this. And a woman has no place preaching the word of God

Reply 0

Shelly Huber 1m ago

Horrible! 🙏🙏🙏

Reply 0

View more comments

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE

Parade
partner publisher · 672.0K followers

'Today' Mourns Death of 'Longtime Fixture of NBC' as Viewers Send Prayers

He appeared in Saturday editions of 'Weekend Today' for 30 years.

19h

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

77 Share

New York Post
partner publisher · 1.6M followers

Barron Trump told cops his body was ‘racing with adrenaline’ when he saw friend get beat up by ex on FaceTime

Barron Trump told British authorities his heart was racing as he witnessed a “very close” female friend get beat up by her ex-boyfriend on a FaceTime call , a UK court heard Thursday. President Trump’s 19-year-old son frantically alerted police in London after realizing his frie…

6d

2K Share

CafeMom
partner publisher · 93.9K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

13-Year-Old Girl Jumped From NYC Bridge to Her Death & Family Says It Happened Because She Was Taken From Them

TRIGGER WARNING: This post contains information about suicide, which may be triggering to some. Jade Smith was just 13 years old when she jumped from the Brooklyn Bridge into the East River in New York City. Her suicide came after a nearly two-year battle with the…

New York, NY · 8d

2K Share

The US Sun
partner publisher · 2.7M followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Beloved teacher, 28, found dead in snow 300 yards from where she vanished as monster winter storm kills 18

A missing teacher has been found dead just 300 yards from where she was last seen as Winter Storm Fern swept through the country. The monster storm’s death toll has...

Emporia, KS · 2d

2K Share

That Grape Juice
partner publisher · 17.4K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Ray J Says He Expects to Be Dead Before the End of February After Heart Failure Diagnosis

Ray J shocked viewers of his late-night livestream on Monday (January 27) when he revealed his latest stint in the hospital was accompanied with confirmation he only has “three weeks to live.” » Read more about: Ray J Reveals He “Only Has Weeks to Live” After Heart Failure…

16h

2K Share

RadarOnline
partner publisher · 1.1M followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

'Disrespectful' Trump Accused of Leaving Wife Melania in the Rain to 'Protect His Spray Tan' in Resurfaced Clip of First Couple

The president appeared to be unconcerned with his wife standing in the rain while he shielded himself with an umbrella as he chatted with the press.

8d

787 Share

OK Magazine
partner publisher · 1.1M followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Michelle Obama Reveals She Would 'Actively Work Against' Husband Barack Trying to Run for President Again: 'Two Terms Is Enough'

Michelle Obama revealed she wouldn't be happy if husband Barack tried to run for president again during a sit-down on the 'Call Her Daddy' podcast.

7d

925 Share

Daily Mail
partner publisher · 2.0M followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Pawn Stars' Corey Harrison is rushed to hospital with '11 breaks in his rib cage' after a crash

Pawn Stars' Corey Harrison has been rushed to hospital with '11 breaks in his rib cage' after suffering a crash.

2d

306 Share

People
publisher · 573.0K followers

Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith Were 'Very Happy' as They Supported Son Jaden at Paris Fashion Week (Exclusive Source)

Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith were photographed spending time in Paris on Jan. 21

2d

3 Share

Daily Mail
partner publisher · 2.0M followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Lawyer who died on flight after falling asleep on her mother's shoulder had undiagnosed condition

Rachel Green was aboard the Delta flight to London from Minneapolis to conduct research for a novel she was writing about Eleanor of Aquitaine.

1d

131 Share

shefinds
partner publisher · 810.7K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Oprah Reveals She Felt 'Humiliated And Embarrassed' When Joan Rivers Told Her She 'Must Lose' Weight In A Resurfaced Interview: 'I Had A Real Public Struggle'

Oprah Winfrey has been turning heads and making headlines with her weight loss, receiving a lot of positive reception. However, she's also been reflecting on a time that wasn't so positive. The famous talk show host, as she's been p...

3d

401 Share

TheWrap
partner publisher · 217.3K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

‘The View’ Host Whoopi Goldberg Gobsmacked by Melania Trump Speaking Out on Minnesota Violence: ‘Who Was That?!’

"I can't remember the last time I saw her," the ABC moderator jokes The post ‘The View’ Host Whoopi Goldberg Gobsmacked by Melania Trump Speaking Out on Minnesota Violence: ‘Who Was That?!’ appeared first on TheWrap .

Minnesota · 1d

610 Share

TheDailyBeast
partner publisher · 617.3K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Beloved Morning Show Personality Dies at 80

Facebook TV personality Peter Napolitano, better known to viewers as ‘Produce Pete,’ has died at 80. NBC New York announced the death of its longtime weekend contributor on Monday. Napolitano was a fixture on Weekend Today in New York for more than 30 years,…

1d

16 Share

OK Magazine
partner publisher · 1.1M followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Donald Trump Mocked for Claiming Wife Melania's New Documentary Is a 'Must-Watch': 'Pathetic'

Donald Trump faced online backlash after calling Melania Trump’s new documentary a 'must-watch.'

1d

575 Share

USA TODAY
partner publisher · 1.8M followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Is another winter storm coming? Here's this weekend's forecast

It may not be the news anyone except ski resorts might want to hear, but certain parts of the East Coast could be looking at another load of wintry precipitation by the weekend , in addition to the snow, ice and extreme cold that will already be gripping much of the country. …

2d

121 Share

TheDailyBeast
partner publisher · 617.3K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

‘Wheel of Fortune’s’ First $1M Winner Reveals Harsh Reality

The first millionaire winner of Wheel of Fortune says it isn’t all that it’s made out to be. In October 2008, Michelle Moore (previously Michelle Loewenstein) became the show’s first millionaire winner, taking home $1,026,800 when she was a contestant. She won big just da…

5d

366 Share

Just Jared
partner publisher · 46.0K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Judge Gives Warning About Barron Trump's Account of Alleged Attack, Says It Could Be 'Biased'

A Court Justice in the UK, Joel Bennathan, issued a reminder to a jury on Monday (January 26). If you don’t know, Barron Trump‘s account was included in a case that is currently going on overseas. Barron was reportedly on a video call with a woman who was not named when…

2d

638 Share

Showbiz Cheat Sheet
partner publisher · 562.3K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Latest Appearance Signals Erika Kirk Has Abandoned the Heavy Glam That Made Her a Punchline Online

Ever since Charlie Kirk's death, his wife, Erika Kirk, has been taking on his responsibilities. A significant part of Erika's new duties involves headlining Turning Point USA events, such as AmericaFest. With her increased media appearances, Erika Kirk's appearance has received a…

2d

545 Share

The Mary Sue
partner publisher · 163.4K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Woman goes in bank with her husband. Then the 3 female bank clerks give him a sexist warning about her: ‘Like it’s OUR money. We are ONE’

A woman went to her local bank with her husband, only for bank clerks to make rude remarks about her in front of him. According to Zoe Goulet (@zogoulet), “all three of the clerks” questioned her husband’s decision to put her name on his bank account. They reportedly tol…

5d

497 Share

Altitude Post
partner publisher · 33.4K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

“The Whole Country Is Going to Get Blown Up” — Trump Threatens Total Destruction to Iran If Anything Happens — “Wiped Off the Face of the Earth.”

President of the United States Donald Trump (CC-BY-4.0: Gage Skidmore) President Donald Trump delivered one of his strongest warnings yet to Iran’s leadership, saying the country would face total destruction if any harm were to come to him, as reports circulate of…

7d

3K Share

Fortune
partner publisher · 499.6K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Elon Musk warns the U.S. could soon be producing more chips than we can turn on. And China doesn't have the same issue

"The limiting factor for AI deployment is fundamentally electrical power," Musk said at the World Economic Forum on Thursday.

6d

629 Share

shefinds
partner publisher · 810.7K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Jelly Roll Fans Say They Are 'Saddened' And 'Disappointed' He Is Joining Kid Rock's 'Rock The Country' Festival After Previously Showing Support For Donald Trump: 'I'm Heartbroken'

Jelly Roll has long been praised for his emotional music, his super-impressive weight loss, and more. But he is now dealing with a wave of criticism after he was announced as one of the performers at Kid Rock‘s controversial Rock The Country fe...

Ocala, FL · 5d

6K Share

Altitude Post
partner publisher · 33.4K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Trump Mocks Ilhan Omar — “She Is Always Talking About the Constitution. She Comes From a Country That Is a Disaster. It Is Not Even a Country”

President Trump, Ilhan Omar (CC-BY-4.0 / Gage Skidmore) President Trump mocked Rep. Ilhan Omar during a rally, questioning her commitment to the U.S. Constitution and contrasting her with immigrants he described as “great people” coming to the country legall…

20h

1K Share

Latin Times
partner publisher · 210.6K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Ted Cruz Reportedly Claims Trump Told Him 'F--k You' When He Tried To Warn Him Against Tariffs

Texas Senator Ted Cruz said President Donald Trump told him "f--k you" when he tried to warn him against imposing tariffs as a key part of his policies, according to a new report. Axios detailed conversations Cruz had with private donors last year as he eyes a potential…

Texas · 3d

744 Share

RadarOnline
partner publisher · 1.1M followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

EXCLUSIVE: Serena Williams' Dad 'King Richard,' 83, Dramatically Halts Divorce From Her Ex-Stripper Stepmom, 46, for Second Time

King Richard has abruptly halted his divorce again from Serena Williams' ex-stripper stepmom.

6d

118 Share

Us Weekly
partner publisher · 746.2K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Man Dismembered Pregnant Sister Because She Was ‘No Longer Innocent,’ Left Pieces of Her on Neighbor’s Steps

A man in Minnesota admitted to killing his pregnant sister and dismembering her body because he believed she was "no longer innocent" after she became pregnant. The Dakota County Attorney's Office announced that Jack Joseph Ball pleaded guilty to premeditated…

Lakeville, MN · 1d

1K Share

New York Post
partner publisher · 1.6M followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

Gavin Newsom ignored calls to help girl, 5, left with half a skull in crash caused by illegal immigrant, dad says

The heartbroken father of a 5-year-old girl who suffered life-altering injuries in a multi-vehicle pileup caused by an illegal-immigrant truck driver says Gov. Gavin Newsom has stonewalled the family's desperate calls for help. Dalilah Coleman, now 7, was left nonverbal and is…

California · 3d

1K Share

The Bible Uncovered

user · 12.2K followers

The Bible Mentions a Sin That Was Never Forgiven and Never Repeated

In Leviticus 10, two priests offer "unauthorized fire" before God and die instantly. No warning. No second chance. The story is brutal and brief. What's stranger is what happens next. The command they violated is never…

14d

582 Share

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

National Examiner
partner publisher · 16.3K followers

Garth Brooks ‘Nervous’ to Leave Trisha Yearwood ‘Behind’ As He Heads Out on Tour: ‘She’s His Anchor’

Garth Brooks is hittin’ the road again. “New Year, New Music, New Tour???” the “Friends in Low Places” singer recently teased on his website. But sources warn things have already gotten off to a rocky start. “He’s nervous as hell about leaving Trisha [Yearwood, his wife]…

2d

138 Share

Parade
partner publisher · 672.0K followers

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF

'90s Singer Jewel Stops Concert Mid-Song After Audience Catches Her Off-Guard

Something magical happened.

2d

146 Share

Explore our developer-friendly HTML to PDF API Printed using PDFCrowd HTML to PDF